

Impacts of Covid-19 on Human Existence in the Contemporary World

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic took the 2020 world by storm and shook it to the foundations. It hit the world without premonitions, spread faster than wild fire and struck with malignant ferociousness. What started as a puzzle in late 2019 became a full pandemic in 2020, throwing the entire world into a frenzy of panic and confusion. Nation after nation went into lockdown. The entire world raced for remedy. Hundreds of thousands became ill within weeks. Existence of humans became threatened worldwide. People's mode of living forcefully changed. Death became imminent. Uncertainty hovered over human existence. The meaning of existence came under question as the world grappled with the malignant virus. This work probes the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on human existence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The last weeks of 2019 presented the world with a puzzling kind of illness. The illness was so strange. It was not like anything the world ever experienced before. The contagion was high. The symptoms were severe. The fatalities rose rapidly. It was initially a Chinese province's problem [1]. The authorities were still managing it as any other disease that could be reined in within reasonable time. However, within weeks, it had spread to many Chinese provinces. By January 2020, it had been reported in all the continents, rapidly spreading across nations. By February, it was officially declared a pandemic. That was the rapid history of what started as a Chinese province's problem, grew into a Chinese problem, became a pandemic, and now a global epidemic. Such is the world's experience of COVID-19, a disease it never expected nor prepared for. Humanity rose in response to tackle the pandemic the best way it could. City after city was locked down while the entire world went into a frantic search for vaccines and remedy.

Although the world had experienced many pandemics in the past, the severity of COVID-19 is not like

anything humanity has experienced in recent time. COVID-19 was gruesomely ferocious. The daily death tolls were alarming. The disruption it caused was so rife that it pervaded virtually all aspects of human existence. The world was simply turned on its ends. Chaos was ubiquitous. From city to city, nation after nation went into lockdown. Businesses were shut down; economic activities were stalled and millions of people lost their jobs and sources of livelihood overnight. Palpable fear hung over the entire globe. To put it succinctly, death became handy. Anxiety became widespread. Gloom and uncertainty hung over human existence.

The pandemic impacted heavily on the human psyche. Life was questioned. Suicides were rife. Anxiety became the regular mood of existence. So many facets of existence lost meaningfulness. The future of humanity in the disease prone world remained uncertain. Man is the only animal that does not live for the sake of staying alive. Man, is the only animal that needs a reason to live. Man is the only animal only animal that questions the worth of its existence. The disruption of the daily routines of life

by COVID-19 and the forced isolation that is associated with the virus cast a pall of meaninglessness on existence. Yet that was not the first time something like that ever happened to humanity. Pandemics have been parts of human experiences in recorded history. The COVID-19 though novel is nevertheless a pandemic like other pandemics in history. Man, ultimately prevailed over them. The COVID-19 like all pandemics would eventually be overcome by humanity through herd immunity [2].

2. History of Pandemics

The term, 'pandemic' comes from two Latin words: *pan* which means "all", and *demos* which means "people". Literally, "pandemic" means "all the people". The term is used to denote certain kinds of diseases principally because of their widespread nature. Those diseases tend to affect all people. Medically, a pandemic refers to an infectious disease affecting a significantly large number of people which has spread across the continents or regions [3]. For a disease to be classified as a pandemic, it must be infectious. It must spread from one region to another. It must involve a very large number of people. Even if a disease involves a very large number of people across the continents but is not seen to spread from one region to another or is seen to occur simultaneously in those regions. Such disease cannot be classified as a pandemic but endemic.

The world has had quite a few pandemics with their devastating impacts worldwide. The first well recorded pandemic in human history was the Black Death which ravaged Eurasia, the Mediterranean and parts of North Africa between 1346 and 1353 [4]. That is not to say that it was the first pandemic ever. Pandemics are as old as human existence. Smallpox pandemics were always troubling ancient history. The Black Death was otherwise known as the bubonic plague. The plague infected humans via flea bites or contacts with infected animals. Afterwards, it spread through person to person infections via droplets in the air. The Black Death claimed estimated 200 million lives worldwide [5].

The Russian flu pandemic of 1889 – 1890 took its toll on humanity. It took to the grave, estimated one million people worldwide [6]. The Russian flu, interestingly was a coronavirus disease. It was suspected to be caused by the OC43 strand of the coronavirus [7]. However, at the time of the pandemic it was assumed to be an influenza. Recent researches show that the pandemic was most likely caused by the aforementioned strand of human coronavirus. The pandemic originated in the Russian town of Bukhara. The existence of long-distance railroads especially the

Trans-Caspian railroad enabled the disease to spread to far distances over a short period of time. It was also the era of steam engine ships. Transportation was easier. It made the spread of the pandemic easier.

The Spanish flu, though a misnomer, held the world spellbound in 1918. The term is a misnomer because, contrary to the apparent Spanish origin of the pandemic it portrays, the first case of the flu was actually reported in Kansas in the United States. The pandemic occurred towards the end of the WWI. Belligerent nations were understandably managing adverse information to create the impression of being okay. The pandemic was apparently covered up in the affected countries. But in neutral Spain, information flowed freely. The pandemic was reported freely. Hence, the name "Spanish flu". It took to the untimely grave, estimated 50 million people [8]. The pandemic was caused by the H1N1 influenza A virus.

There was the Asian flu which broke out in the Chinese southern region province, Guizhou. The pandemic spanned 1957 and 1958. It was yet another influenza induced pandemic. This time around, the strain was H2N2. The pandemic killed estimated 4 million people [9].

There was also, the cholera pandemic of 1965 – 1971. It was first recorded in Makassar in South Sulawesi in Indonesia but quickly spread to neighboring Bangladesh and India. The pandemic would eventually spread to Russia, Italy and much of North Africa. The pandemic, yet spread to South Pacific and Japan. The pandemic was caused by bacteria known as El Tor, which is a strand of vibrio cholerae. It infected over a million people. The pandemic spread across a total of 73 countries. It was majorly contracted by consuming food or drinking water that has been contaminated by the bacteria.

HIV/AIDS was a pandemic which has become endemic to humanity. It is now referred as a global epidemic. There are controversies with touchy political undertones surrounding the origin of HIV/AIDS. Many authors tend to fix the origin of the pandemic in 1981. However, on June 5, 1981, Center for Disease Control, an agency of the United States government reported a new disease which would later be called AIDS in five gay men. Some authors however believe that HIV/AIDS had been in existence even in the 1920s. The disease is believed to have transferred to humans from primates. It decimates the immune system, giving room for opportunistic infections.

The pandemic jolted the world and altered social attitudes to sexual relationships decisively. The next pandemic the world would experience after learning

to live with HIV/AIDS is the contemporary COVID-19. However, coronavirus diseases are not new to humanity. What makes it a pandemic this time is the mutant strand that has been christened as COVID 19. But what is coronavirus?

3. The Coronavirus

The coronavirus is not new to humanity. At least, humanity has grappled with the human coronavirus since the 1960s. The virus was generally associated with common colds. The symptoms were not severe. The virus although initially differently named by different researchers was ultimately called coronavirus because of its crown like appearance [10]. That was the human coronavirus. It had many strains, with significantly varying capabilities. The strains commonly caused upper respiratory infections though. They exacerbated some existing conditions like asthma and bronchitis. The virus sometimes induced pneumonia, especially in young adults and infants.

There were also animal coronavirus strains with rather severer effects. These strains were a source of concern to researchers given that a wide variety of pets and household animals were susceptible to their infection. In 2002-2003, a new strain of coronavirus infection broke out in Southern China. It was the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome. The strain varied from those previously seen in humans and animals. It is not certain whether they infected humans from animals. However, a study pointed out that those who slaughtered animals in the food market around where the epidemic originally broke out had asymptomatic SARS infections. It is possible that SARS got to humans through animals. There is no decisive evidence though. Humans eventually reigned in SARS as the last recorded SARS infection took place in 2014 in a laboratory setting [11]. The coronavirus continued to mutate though. Late 2019, the world was jolted by the epidemic of yet another coronavirus infection originating again in China. The symptoms were severe and the fatalities were so high. The strain of coronavirus was named “COVID-19”.

4. COVID-19

In December 2019, there was an outbreak of corona virus disease with symptoms and severity never witnessed before. The disease broke out in Wuhan, in the southern part of China. Some studies have suggested that the disease may have originated in Wuhan’s seafood market [12]. Some also claimed that the virus that caused the disease may have escaped from the lab at Wuhan Institute of Virology. The virus was initially called Wuhan Virus. But in deference to the WHO 2015 directive not to name diseases after places, in February 2020, WHO named

the disease, “corona virus disease 2019”, shortened and better known as “COVID-19” [13].

4.1. Nature and Clinical Characteristics of COVID-19

COVID-19 is caused by a virus scientifically called SARS-COV-2. SARS-COV-2. It is a novel corona virus disease with severe, acute respiratory symptoms. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a member of the Beta coronavirus genus of the coronaviridae family of viruses whose striking characteristics are their ability to infect both animals and humans. They are capable of causing gastrointestinal infections in animals and respiratory illness in humans [14,15]. The symptoms of COVID-19 vary from infected individual to another. Some patients even show no symptoms all; do not even know that they have the virus unless a test says so. They are thoroughly asymptomatic.

Generally, the identified symptoms are dry cough, weakness and high body temperature. Less frequently observed symptoms include vomiting, joint pains, loss of senses of taste and smell, severe headache, nasal congestion and sore throat. Some patients experience reduced blood oxygen content and shortness of breath as the disease progresses [16]. The severity of these symptoms varies depending on the strength of the patient’s immune system. While the symptoms of the disease could be mild in some patients, it could be moderate or severe in others. Generally, symptoms of the disease become noticeable after an average of five days incubation period on infection [17]. Diagnosis of Covid-19 is mainly by real-time polymerase chain reactions carried out on fluid samples obtained from the mouth, the throat, the eyes, the lower respiratory tract, the intestine, nasopharynx and even feces obtained from suspected individuals with a view to determining the presence of genetic materials peculiar to SARS-COV-2 [4,5].

4.2. The Pandemic Dimensions of COVID-19: Epidemiology and Transmission

As stated above, genesis of COVID-19 has been traced to the Huanan seafood market in Wuhan, Hubei province of China, albeit controversially. Its first incidence has been established to have most likely occurred in December, 2019. Whether it is of animal origin or laboratory created is a matter of controversy as the debates are inconclusive. It has been reported to have the highest incidence of human to human transmission when compared to other viruses’ human beings have contracted. The major routes of transmission are droplets borne by the air from the coughs and sneezes of infected persons that might be inhaled by uninfected persons. Direct

contact with surfaces that may have been contaminated or with body fluids of infected persons from where it might gain entry into an individual's body via the mouth, nose or eyes [18,19].

COVID-19 has attained phase 6 in the pandemic grading system. It was declared a pandemic in March, 2020 by the WHO. It is now the most topical subject of international concern. It has led to social and existential upheavals of global proportions. It could arguably be adjudged as the leading threat to humanity's continued existence [20]

4.3. Mechanism and Pathogenesis of COVID-19 Fatality

The moment SARS-COV-2 gains entry into the body through any of the routes of transmission, it finds its way to the lungs where it infects alveolar cells by the aid of its unique spike proteins found on the outer surface of its viral envelope. This triggers immune responses by the body. The immune responses are of two kinds: the release of substances that raise alarm on the invasion of the body by foreign organisms. The body triggers further immune responses; including the release of immune agents that actually neutralize the threat by attacking the infected areas and killing the infected cells. But in the process of attacking and killing the infected cells, even healthy alveolar cells are destroyed. The sustained signaling of immune responses (cytokine storm) causes more damage to the affected tissues. The damage and death of cells within the affected area eventually reflects in their biochemical and physiological functions as they become unable to mediate gas exchanges, which then results in respiratory problems collectively known as Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome. This ultimately cascades into multi-organ failures due to hypoxia, as insufficient oxygen is being conveyed by the blood to the various organs of the body. It is this failure of the body organs to effectively perform their expected functions that ultimately leads to the death of COVID-19 patients. Reports have shown that COVID-19 caused mortality rate is higher amongst older persons and in persons with medical conditions prior to COVID-19 [21].

4.4. Medical Responses to COVID-19

The emergence and proliferation of COVID-19 cases across the world has elicited a lot of responses internationally and nationally. Globally, most of these responses are being coordinated by WHO, the United States Centre for Disease Control (CDC) and the diverse health infrastructures of various nations such as the ministries/departments of health, national centers for disease control and voluntary non-governmental organizations. The principal responses to COVID-19 have been the following:

prevention/spread control; diagnostics/therapeutics; and vaccination. In a bid to check the spread of the virus, all manner of measures has been dished out, ranging from social distancing, constant hand-washing, the use of face/nose masks to lockdowns. In diagnostics/therapeutics, a lot of suggestions have been put out. At a particular period, the use of hydroxychloroquine as a treatment regimen became a subject of serious scientific debate. The claims and counter-claims of the cure presented by the people and government of Madagascar prompted another round of international arguments. The fact that information about the characteristics of the disease keeps changing is one of the frustrations in the fight against COVID-19. Even when a lot is being advocated as possible cures for COVID-19 there is yet to be a universally accepted conventional treatment agent. There was a push for universal vaccination to contain the virus, attain herd immunity and end the pandemic. Surprisingly, the vaccine was met with the strongest of resistance ever known in the history of vaccination. Several concerns have been raised over the motives, legality and medical correctness of the vaccines. In addition, diverse issues and questions regarding the scientific authenticity of the vaccines are yet to be adequately resolved. Furthermore, a lot of conspiracy theories have been associated with COVID-19 vaccines. An incredible number of myths have been created around the COVID-19 vaccines and are disseminated in the cyberspace. These factors have caused vaccine hesitancy and, in some places, a complete rejection of the COVID-19 vaccines

5. Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID 19 pandemic literally turned the world on its ends. It put a momentary pause on the usual way of being in the world on almost all spheres of existence. The world so to speak, came to a standstill. The ramifications of COVID-19 were felt in the social, political, economic, military and religious spheres of existence. Its demographic and medical ramifications were no less impactful on human existence. The pandemic made several incisions on the fabrics of human existence. It didn't spare the human personality itself.

5.1. Social Impacts of COVID-19

COVID-19 is basically a social disease. Its highly contagious nature put it squarely in the social domain. Its pandemic status meant that it spread over the continents involving a significant number of the human population. COVID-19 interestingly spread faster than most pandemics and infected far much greater number of people than most pandemics. Being a social disease, the first measure adopted by the

authorities almost worldwide was to restrict social interactions. Cities and entire countries were placed on lockdown. Movement was severely restricted. International borders were shut down. Even local borders were shut down. At the peak of the pandemic, people were restricted from leaving their homes. All social gatherings were forbidden. A new and tiresome form of individualism was forced upon humanity. New phrase known as “social distancing” crept into the lexicon of human existence. Couples were trapped in their homes. No opportunity for social let outs. Splits skyrocketed. Claustrophobia became a government enforced virtue.

The social impacts of COVID-19 were multifaceted. People could not visit loved ones even on sickbed. Families were separated by lockdown. Aloneness as an existential reality hung over humanity.

5.2. Political Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 hit with many political ramifications. Practically every country hit by the pandemic declared a national emergency which unavoidably set in motion a series of political actions. Governments assumed emergency powers which often infringed on rights of citizens and clogged democracy. The pandemic gave political execs so much power that legislative processes were often abridged. People generally felt that the government was making incursions into their privacy. The pandemic forced most governments into e-governance, where most government business were done online. The COVID-19 pandemic created room for government to interfere significantly with individuals' healthcare management. The pandemic equally cost the government a great lot. Government revenues dwindled as nations were on lockdown. Yet government had to pay people to stay home. Palliatives and different forms of stimulus were packaged by the government to alleviate the sufferings of the people.

5.3. Economic Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic occasioned massive lockdowns which also included lockdown of economic activities. People were prevented from going to work. Factories and businesses were shut down. Markets were closed down. Economic activities were brought to a standstill worldwide. Jobs were lost by the millions. So many businesses became insolvent and sunk down. The pandemic brought so much economic anxieties and their attendant maladies. There was literally shortage of everything as production nosedived. Inflation skyrocketed as governments were literally dolling out cash to the citizenry. So many people lost their source of livelihood. Many people defaulted in the discharge of

their financial obligations. Mortgages and rent payments became problematic. People couldn't service their loans. Real estate lost value. Economic activities were globally reduced to an all-time low because of a near global restriction of economic activities and movement.

5.4. Military Impacts of COVID-19

The health hazards posed by COVID-19 impacted significantly on military activities around the world. Recruitments dropped drastically. Armies were wary of the possibility of mass infection. Perhaps the only positive impact of the pandemic was a global reduction in military activities at the peak of the pandemic. There were also concerns about the possibility of the weaponization of the virus. This was at the backdrop of conspiracy theories that considered the virus a laboratory creation. The pandemic heightened global awareness on the dangers of biological warfare. People saw the virus spread in a short period of time from China to all the continents. Assuming that the virus was indeed a laboratory creation, the world would have seen vividly that the outcomes of biological warfare would pose a threat to global health.

5.5. Religious Impacts of COVID-19

Religion is generally a social activity. As lockdowns were imposed, religious gatherings were also prohibited. This created so much tension among religious people. Many felt that religion dwelt on the meaning of existence itself. Therefore, denying them access to religious support was considered a grievous deprivation. Houses of worship were closed for months. In the United States lawsuits challenged the power of the government to do that [22]. The pandemic also created a crisis of meaning. People questioned the meaning of existence itself. Death was always around the corner. Indeed, people were dying in huge numbers on a daily basis. It triggered religious responses that the world was after all, ephemeral. The pandemic also affected the yearly Muslim hajj in Saudi Arabia. Travel ban meant that people could not travel for hajj. Social distancing also meant that people could not converge in large numbers let alone the phenomenally large numbers associated with the hajj.

5.6. Medical Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic shook the world of medicine to its foundations. It also took a heavy toll on medical personnel all over the world. In some parts of the world, hospitals were overwhelmed. The highly infectious nature of the virus made medical personnel among the first victims of the disease. They were already in contact with infected persons before adequate information was gathered on the nature of

the disease. At the peak of the pandemic, having a career in the medical practice became an extreme risk enterprise. It became a call to heroism. Many indeed did pay the supreme price. The issues surrounding the nature of the virus and appropriate treatment for infected persons threw the medical profession into a deep and hotly contentious controversy.

Among the earliest medical responses to the COVID-19 pandemic was the treatment of infected persons with hydroxychloroquine. It was a treatment response that ripped the medical profession in two halves. While those who administered the treatment vouched for its efficacy and safety, some others considered hydroxychloroquine dangerous. The regulatory authorities did in fact get involved. In some instances, the advocates of the hydroxychloroquine treatment option were sanctioned and the dispensation of the medication forbidden. This gave rise to a level of distrust among the members of the medical profession. There was a widespread belief that medicine was being mixed with politics; a situation many felt, ought not be.

The vaccines also introduced a new dimension to medical practice. Some mandatory medical requirements for the approval of a vaccine were waived to get the COVID-19 vaccines approved. The efficacy of the vaccines was also a grave source of concern. Vaccinated persons often got infected despite the vaccine, canceling the very scientific basis for vaccination, namely to prevent infection. Vaccinated persons had to take boosters upon boosters to boost the vaccination. Yet, they were still liable to infection. This further heightened the COVID-19 responses induced division in medical practice.

Another medical concern was the safety of the vaccines. Many in the medical profession believed that the vaccines were not sufficiently screened. Many believed that the vaccines are capable of causing harm to some of its users. This suspicion led to vaccine hesitancy among the populace. The mandatory vaccination imposed on the populace by so many governments became a matter of medical concern. A significant proportion of the populace felt that their medical privacy was being violated and their rights eroded. Thus, they regarded the vaccine mandate as medical tyranny. The disquiet about the mandates led to protests across the globe.

5.7. Impacts of COVID-19 on the Foundations of Science

Approaches to the management of COVID-19 stirred up controversies which touched on the foundations of science. The line between science and the fiats of the

state became increasingly blurred. The pandemic brought about a critical inroad of politics into the medical science. Many of the decisions taken on COVID-19 were done by politicians rather than allowing scientific consensus to guide responses to COVID-19. All through the history of science, political authorities were never considered to be scientific authorities. In the case of COVID-19, the authorities became the deciders of what is to be considered scientifically right or wrong. To make matters worse, media personalities became emergency scientists. Media outlets censored scientific opinions that didn't suit their preferred narrative. Science became groupthink (25). Free thought, the very foundation of science was massively suppressed (26).

5.8. Psychological Impacts of COVID-19

The severity of the COVID-19 pandemic dropped a pall of anxiety over the entire globe. There were so many sudden negative changes that pushed human existence on the downward trend. People were confined to one place. Many were stuck at home with people they ordinarily wouldn't spend a lot of time with. It created anxiety. Businesses were shut down leading to loss of jobs and businesses. A lot of people helplessly watched their life work businesses crumble. That put a huge psychological pressure on them. There were so many suicides and so many psychosomatic disorders occasioned by the depression engendered by the pandemic. Stress related diseases took a sharp rise. Anxiety was widespread. The outlawing of social activities including going to the gym inflicted a psychological strain on people.

6. Conclusion

COVID-19 has proven to be a disease which the world must learn to live with. Its status has shifted from pandemic to endemic. The world has never been the same since the disease broke out. It impacted on the world in so many eponymous ways. Pandemics have always been traumatic to the world. The severity of COVID-19 was traumatic to a degree the world never experienced before. The world is only rallying to bounce back from the effects of the pandemic. This work has detailed the ways the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on human existence. The pandemic posed existential concerns to humanity. It was simply devastating. But the good news is that humanity rose to the occasion to push it back to regain a modicum of normalcy. Some of the impacts of the pandemic might endure for long but humanity remains resolute in its quest for normalcy. The pandemic is definitely steadily rolled back. It is a triumph of humanity's quest for survival.

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